

The Process and Subjective Well-Being of the Multi-Arts Creative Group Program to Female Elders in a Long-Term Care Center

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Summary

The “World population ageing 2020 highlights” reported more than 727 million people were aged ≥ 65 years in 2020. The report further stated that women typically outlive men and are likely to be the majority of the older population in the future (United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs, 2021). In a survey of 3,602 older adults aged 65–90 years, Lukaschek et al. (2017) found that female respondents reported much lower levels of subjective well-being than did their male counterparts. In addition, these women expressed a desire for autonomy and societal engagement, emphasizing the importance of both physical health and psychological well-being in the context of aging and health challenges. Taiwan, an aging society, anticipates an increase in older residents in long-term care centers. Studies on older women residing in long-term care centers have primarily focused on autonomy and social connections concerning well-being. However, aspects of subjective well-being, such as positive emotions and life satisfaction, have received less attention.

This study was conducted to understand and enhance the subjective well-being of older women from their own perspective. Expression is fundamental to understanding; engagement in artistic activities can boost mental health, creativity, and overall well-being. Our objective was to investigate the overall experience and subjective well-being of older women as well as the therapeutic benefits of engaging in different art forms. This study included older female residents of a long-term care center in northern Taiwan, who participated in a multi-arts creative group program. We excluded individuals with psychological problems and mental illnesses, focusing

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instead on a general population of older women. The study cohort comprised eight women (mean age, 74.6 years).

The multi-arts healing creative group program, which was based on positive psychology, aimed to improve the subjective well-being of older women and enhance their positive psychological functioning for sustained subjective well-being. The theoretical basis for the program design was two-fold. First, it was based on the concept of “subjective well-being” proposed by Diener et al. (1999), which involves one’s perception of increasing positive affect and diminishing negative affect as well as high levels of overall and specific life satisfaction. Second, it drew on “positive psychological functioning” proposed by Diener et al. (2017), which encompasses the ability of individuals to maintain optimism and positive expectations for the future. The program incorporated various art forms, including music, movement, visual arts, and drama. During this 5-week program, weekly 90 minute group meetings were conducted. The research methodology was hermeneutic phenomenology.

The present study yielded five key findings. First, at baseline (before the program), the participants were unfamiliar with visual arts; they felt that their physical functioning was declining yet retained a learning mindset. Second, at the program onset, the participants experienced anxiety stemming from the uncertainty of creation, frustration because of challenges in mastering the medium, and cautiousness as they engaged in creation primarily to complete tasks. Third, during the middle and later stages of the program, the participants embraced imagination, feeling relaxed, happy, and hopeful; observed that art reflected life, transitioning from interactions with people, space, and artwork to broader life concerns; and enhanced self-perception, shifting from resisting aging to self-appreciation. Fourth, the program enhanced subjective well-being as the participants transformed their expectations into practical, flexible actions, yielding positive emotions; they gradually adjusted their satisfaction levels, marked by self-acceptance and empathy-driven altruistic practices. Fifth, the different art forms produced different therapeutic functions: music and movement encouraged a mindset of accepting mistakes, visual arts gave opportunities for enjoyment and self-expression, and drama provided opportunities for enjoyment and self-expression.

Practical implications: First, the balance between multi-arts exposure and learning skills should be adjusted. Second, individuals’ understanding of art therapy should be improved, and incorporate themes of graceful. Third, media manipulation should be addressed, and creativity should be fostered. Fourth, the transition from art accompaniment to collaborative learning should be strengthened.

Suggestions for program design: Although the program may remain short-term, different designs, such as initial, intermediate, and advanced levels, may be implemented to progressively evaluate the benefits of art creation for older women.